



# National Center on Student Progress Monitoring

## Curriculum Based Measurement and Statewide Tests

Prepared by  
Kathleen McLane

Statewide tests are generally given annually to students in elementary, middle, and high schools. These tests serve several purposes:

1. They measure how each student has achieved in comparison to an established standard, or level of knowledge, that all students are expected to possess at the grade level. (Increasingly, student scores are also used to determine promotion, graduation, and, in many states, the type of diploma a student can receive.)
2. The test scores of all the students in a school are used to determine the success of the school. Schools are held accountable by the state for the scores of their students. Schools are, in effect, “graded” on how well their students do on the tests. If a school’s “grade” is not high enough, then the state may impose consequences on the school involving funding and/or requirements for improving test scores.
3. The state is rated by the federal government (U.S. Department of Education) on the basis of the scores of all the schools in the state. If the state’s performance level is not high enough, then the federal government may cut the state’s education funding and impose other restrictions.

In other words, everyone has a great deal at stake with the statewide tests – students,

schools, and the state. For this reason, the term “high-stakes testing” is often used to describe these tests. Because the testing involves holding both schools and school systems accountable for the number of their students that meet the standards, the term “standards-based accountability” is also often used. Both terms refer to the statewide testing described here.

### Students with Disabilities and Statewide Testing

Ten years ago, students with disabilities were seldom included in statewide testing. And when they were, their scores were sometimes not reported or not included in accountability systems. This meant that schools and states were not penalized for the poor performance of their students with disabilities on statewide tests. Since then, the inclusion of students with disabilities has been increased. The No Child Left Behind legislation requires 95% participation. Because of this, schools now need to find ways to improve the test scores of all students, including those with disabilities. Many special educators have emphasized that, to improve results, it is essential to have an ongoing collection of data on student learning and to use it to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction throughout the school year. In other words, continuous monitoring of progress is needed.

In response to this, teachers and administrators have been looking for progress monitoring methods that enable schools to evaluate

programs and student performance during the year. These methods are necessary to advise changes to programs and instruction when the current practices prove unsuccessful in helping students succeed on the statewide tests.

### **Curriculum-Based Measurement**

Curriculum-based measurement (CBM) offers schools a way to proactively address student progress and instructional methods and programs. CBM tracks a student's rate of progress toward the achievement level required for the school year. Students achieving at this level can be expected to perform successfully on statewide tests in the same academic areas. A variety of studies have found high correlations between CBM scores on reading and math and achievement levels on high-stakes tests. In addition, studies have found a relationship between CBM reading scores and pass rates on the statewide tests. Research in Oregon has showed that students who, at the beginning the third grade, can read more than 110 words correctly in one minute are likely to pass the Oregon statewide test (Good, 2001).

In other words, if your child is progressing satisfactorily in reading or math, based on CBM scores during the year, then the chances are good that he or she will be successful on the statewide test in that academic area. The CBM method has multiple purposes: it can track academic progress, determine the success of instruction (and instructional changes), and predict performance on statewide tests. Monitoring your child's CBM scores can be one of the best ways available to you to help ensure your child is ready for the statewide test.

For further information on high-stakes testing, consult the website of the National Center on Educational Outcomes at <http://education.umn.edu/NCEO>. For more information about curriculum-based measurement, see the other Parent Series papers and related resources at <http://www.studentprogress.org>.

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### **Reference**

Good, R. H. III, Simmons, D. C., & Kameenui, E. J. (2001). The importance and decision-making utility of a continuum of fluency-based indicators of foundational reading skills for third-grade high stakes outcomes. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 5, 257-288.

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